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ABSTRACT

This brochure discusses the role of the parent of a child with a disability in assistive technology considerations. It describes assistive technology devices and services for a child with a disability, and provides information on the following areas: (1) the consideration of assistive technology during the Individualized Education Program (IEP); (2) information needed by the IEP team in order to make decisions about assistive technology; (3) the professionals who can help IEP teams make decisions about assistive technology; (4) decisions the IEP team makes about assistive technology; (5) kinds of assistive technology devices and services considered by the IEP team; (6) where the child's assistive technology needs will be included in the IEP; (7) the inclusion of personal devices in an IEP if a particular personal device is necessary for the child to receive an appropriate education; (8) assistive technology training for the child, parent, and school staff; (9) the responsibility of the school for providing necessary assistive technology devices and services and financial aid for purchasing assistive technology devices. Organizational resources on assistive technology are listed. (CR)

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Parent's Role in Assistive Technology Considerations

Do You Know... Information Brochure

vol. 4 no. 1

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Do You Know ...

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Parent's Role in Assistive Technology Considerations

What is assistive technology (AT)?

Assistive technology (AT) is any device and/or service that helps a child with a disability to:

- do something that he/she cannot do without it; and
- benefit from special education services.

An **assistive technology (AT) device** is any piece of equipment that can be used to increase, maintain, or improve the functioning of a child with a disability. For some children an AT device might be a commonly available item, such as a pencil grip, calculator, or a magnifying glass. Other children might need a modified desk, customized cushions for positioning, or a special communication system.

Assistive technology (AT) services provide help in selecting, acquiring, or using AT devices. Examples of AT services for a child with a disability include:

- evaluating AT needs
- purchasing, leasing or otherwise providing AT devices
- selecting, designing, adapting, or maintaining AT devices
- coordinating AT with other services
- training or technical assistance for a child with a disability, his/her family, and/or the professionals who work with the child

When will AT be considered for my child?

During the annual Individualized Education Program (IEP) review, the IEP team must consider whether a child needs AT to receive an appropriate education. The IEP team may want to consider the following:

- Can AT help support your child's access to educational services and social activities at school?
- Can AT help your child in meeting IEP goals and benchmarks/objectives?
- Can AT help support achievement and independence for your child?

REMEMBER: Not all students will require AT.

What information will the IEP team need in order to make decisions about AT?

For some children, the evaluation team may decide that a formal AT assessment is necessary before the IEP team can consider the AT needs of the child. For other children, the IEP team may be able to make decisions by reviewing information already collected about the child. In both cases the team will want to consider two questions:

- What problem(s) is the child experiencing in meeting goals and objectives/benchmarks in the general education curriculum/classroom?
- What strategies, including AT devices and services, will help meet these goals and objectives/benchmarks in the general education curriculum/classroom?

What professionals can help IEP teams make decisions about AT?

To help make appropriate decisions for your child, the IEP team may ask for advice from:

- an occupational therapist (OT)
- a physical therapist (PT)
- a speech/language pathologist
- an AT specialist

What decisions will an IEP team make about AT?

The IEP team may decide:

- *AT devices and services are not needed.* If the modifications, accommodations, and supplementary aids/services or supports provided by the IEP are working, the IEP team will note that AT is not needed.

(OR)

- *AT devices/services are needed, but the team doesn't have enough information to make a decision about a specific device.* The IEP team can include in the IEP a schedule for trials with a variety of devices/services. Information about the success of those trials can help the IEP team make a final decision. The trial period must have a specific beginning and ending date identified in the IEP.

(OR)

- *AT devices/services already being used are sufficient, and should continue.*

What kinds of AT devices and services will the IEP team consider?

Today there are over 20,000 items classified as AT devices, for all disabilities, all ages, and all levels of functioning. AT can help children talk, write, move, see, read, eat, hear, play, and care for themselves. When the IEP team decides that AT is needed to meet your child's educational needs, they will explore this wide scope of devices and services.

These devices range from low-tech equipment and supports to more complex, high-tech devices. Low-tech equipment and supports include picture schedules, pencil grips or larger pencils for writing, calculators for building math skills, and different kinds of recording equipment. Some examples of high-tech devices include specialized software, voice-output communication devices, and systems that allow students to use eye-gaze to control a computer keyboard.

As the team considers the most appropriate AT devices and services, it is important to remember that AT is just one of many different strategies that they can use to support the needs and strengths of each child with a disability.

Where will my child's AT needs be included in the IEP?

AT may be addressed in the IEP as:

Special education services

- Some AT devices (e.g., communication devices) require specially designed instruction in order for the child to master the use of the device. In these cases, goals and objectives/benchmarks related to this instruction would be included as part of the child's special education services.

Related services

- AT might be involved in special transportation, physical or occupational therapy, or orientation and mobility services. When children begin transition activities into the workplace, AT could be an important related service to provide additional support for the child.

Supplementary aids or services

- AT may be a supplemental aid or service allowing the child to be involved in the general education classroom. Many students depend on assistive listening devices every day to help provide this access to general educational opportunities.

Should my child's glasses or hearing aid be considered AT and be addressed on the IEP?

In most cases, eyeglasses, hearing aids, braces, and other personal use devices are not the responsibility of the school district because the student would need these devices regardless of whether she or he is attending school. Generally, these personal devices would not be listed as AT on the child's IEP. However, an IEP team may decide that a particular personal device is necessary for the child to receive an appropriate education. In that case, the IEP would list the device as AT, to be provided by the school at no cost to the parent.

The school would own the device and could require that the device remain at school when the child leaves for home at the end of the day. If the child needs the device to complete homework assignments, then the school must consider how the child can complete the required assignment within the hours of the school day or send the device home with the child.

Is there AT training for me, my child, and school staff members who work with my child?

AT training for the child, family, and school staff members is a responsibility of the school district. It may be an important part of the IEP. School staff members, in most cases, will be able to arrange and/or provide training that may include:

- basic information about the device
- specific ways the device is used in the child's daily life
- how to trouble-shoot minor problems
- changes in use as a child grows and develops

Who is responsible for purchasing an AT device? Who owns the device?

When an IEP team decides that a child with a disability requires AT and includes it in the IEP, the school is responsible for providing the device.

If a family decides they want to purchase and own an AT device, there are three different kinds of funding they can consider, through public programs, private programs, and loans.

- Public or government programs include school districts, state programs that help people with disabilities, and federal insurance agencies that cover AT costs that are medically or occupationally necessary.
- Private funding usually comes from insurance, which covers AT on a policy-by-policy basis. Schools cannot require parents to use Medicaid or private insurance because the cost of AT may count against lifetime caps on coverage, may result in higher premiums, or may require a deductible or percentage pay-

ment. Other private funding may come from nonprofit disability organizations or community groups.

- Financial institutions may offer low interest loan programs for AT. Manufacturers of AT often provide special payment programs.

Any AT purchased by a school belongs to the school district. If the student moves to another school district, the equipment generally remains with the district that bought the device.

When the district is deciding which device to purchase for the child, cost cannot be the deciding factor. However, it is not necessary to buy a specific or more expensive brand name if a less expensive device will meet the child's needs.

Who is responsible for maintaining and repairing AT devices?

The school is responsible for making sure AT devices and/or services required by the student's IEP are available and in working order when needed. Therefore, ultimately the school district is responsible for maintaining, repairing, or replacing the AT device, even if the device is owned by the parents.

An IEP team may become concerned about damage to AT devices off school property and/or the need to buy substitute devices. The team may review the IEP and consider different ways to provide an appropriate education for the child.

For more information and resources on assistive technology, contact:

Your Local School District

Your child's teacher(s), building principal, or director of special education can help answer questions you may have.

Center for Innovations in Education (CISE)

Resources on assistive technology and other topics can be borrowed from the CISE library or ordered through the online library catalog.
(800) 976-2473 (MO only) or (573) 884-7275
www.coe.missouri.edu/~mocise

Missouri Parents Act (MPACT)

Training and information center for parents of children with disabilities.
One West Armout Blvd., Suite 302
Kansas City, MO 64111
(816) 531-7070 or (800) 743-7634
fax: (816) 531-4777
e-mail: mpact@ptimpact.com
www.ptimpact.com

Division of Special Education- Missouri Deptartment of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

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http://services.dese.state.mo.us/divspeced

Missouri Assistive Technology (MAT)

MAT provides access to assistive technology information and products for individuals with disabilities, service providers, and others.
4731 South Cochise, Suite 114
Independence, MO 64055-6975
voice: (800) 647-8557 (in-state only) or (816) 373-5193
tty: (800) 647-8558 (in-state only) or (816) 373-9315
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e-mail: matpmo@swbell.net
www.dolir.state.mo.us/matp

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